



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

September 28, 2021

Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness

By The Rev. Susan D. Parsons

“To Autumn”
John Keats

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more . . .

As Christians we are called to be open to the movement of God throughout our lives. We are called to be open to being changed, to being resurrected. And there is always more of God to contemplate and discover – more than we can imagine.

Of all the times of year that seem appropriate for contemplation, this time of year – autumn – seems to me most appropriate. Every season is a transition, a reminder that our lives are constantly shifting, but autumn is when my soul tugs at me to slow down, to look back over the past year and to consider changes in course or shifts in priorities. I'm more deeply aware of the cycle of slowing down, dying, and rising.

The physical world reflects this slowing pace – the light from the sun is softer; flowers have lost their bloom and vegetable gardens their glory; and the trees, if their leaves aren't turning brilliant colors, at least have the good sense to look tired after a long season of growing.

But in the world of people, life has quickened – meetings, conferences, planning and budgeting for the coming new year, not to mention what's happening in the stores and the media as we head into the holidays. These things call out for our attention and seem to insist we do something productive. It's easy to miss the tug of this mellow, gentle season of autumn that calls us to slow down, and enjoy, and reflect on the "fruits of our labor" from the past year.

I went out for an early morning walk this week – leaves drifted down around me, hints of red and yellow, of fading green in the trees, pinecones and acorns lay scattered at my feet. Everything – the air, the sky, the trees, bushes with berries and dried flowers – seemed to be infused with God. I lingered. Breathed deeply.

The idea of wabi-sabi came to mind – the recognition of beauty in the imperfections of life – what is withered, tarnished, earthy, even broken. It accepts the natural cycle of growth and decay -- impermanence, what is incomplete, imperfect.

Autumn is wabi-sabi, as are we. We are asked to consider this paradox of how God is calling us to become more fully who we already are, while delighting in how we are already beautiful.

Then on my walk, there were footsteps. Someone appeared on the path, cellphone in hand and hustled passed me, head down, eyes fixed on the screen in their hand. I had to step off the sidewalk to let them

pass – they were so unaware of my presence. Part of me wanted to go after them, point out the delights, talk about autumn and beauty and continuity, tell them about what they were missing.

Instead, I gathered up little objects along the way, as I always do when I'm walking – a glorious leaf, plump cluster of berries, a special pinecone, a tiny acorn, an important looking branch lying on the ground. I carry them home with me – they are gifts of this season. I settle them on my altar where they will be blessed and honored reminders of this unfolding season of God's wisdom.

"Pied Beauty"

Gerard Manly Hopkins

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise Him.